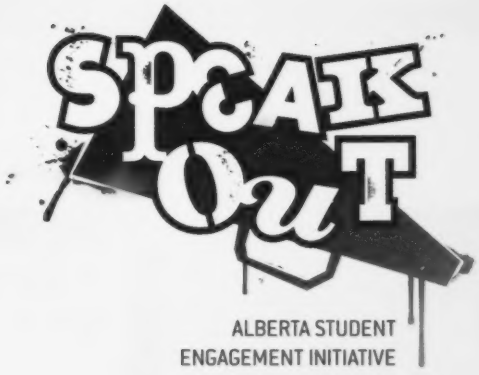

Year in Review
2009–2010

Government of Alberta
Education

Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of Alberta youth we spoke to at the *Speak Out* forums, at the Annual *Speak Out* Conference, and through the *Speak Out* website (**www.speakout.alberta.ca**) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government of Alberta.

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Speak Out Highlights

Leading the nation in best practices of student engagement, the *Speak Out* team chairs the national committee on student engagement.

2nd Annual *Speak Out* Conference included 210 students, 85 educators and 61 chaperones from 54 communities around Alberta.

Hits on the website totalled nearly 200,000.

The *Speak Out* team made over 50 presentations to education stakeholders.

Members of the Minister's Student Advisory Council held *Speak Out* forums in their schools and communities and then met with the Minister to share their results. They also ensured that student engagement remained high on the priority list of their local school jurisdictions.

The team conducted 70 *Speak Out* forums, engaging over 2,300 students.

The *Speak Out* DVD toolkit won 4 Telly Awards.

The *Speak Out* team assisted several jurisdictions in gathering the student voice using the DVD toolkit with hundreds of their students.

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Executive Summary

Speak Out – the Alberta Student Engagement Initiative was created in response to a commitment made in the February 2008 Government of Alberta throne speech:

"This government will not let up on its efforts to further strengthen our education system. To provide a fresh and youthful perspective on learning, the government will establish a youth advisory committee on education. This committee will explore new and innovative ways to improve the learning opportunities available to young Albertans."

Speak Out was officially launched on November 26, 2008, and has created both a space and a means to allow students ages 14 to 19 from across Alberta to reflect on and discuss their education with each other and with key stakeholders who can actually make a difference.

Since the launch, thousands of Alberta students have shared their perspectives and ideas through the four components of *Speak Out*: the interactive and moderated website, **www.speakout.alberta.ca**; *Speak Out* forums, which are small focus group discussions held in schools across the province; the Annual *Speak Out* Conference, where students from across Alberta gather each spring to discuss educational issues; and the Minister's Student Advisory Council, which includes 24 youths who meet the Minister of Education a few times a year.

Speak Out Website

Alberta has more than 200,000 students in Grades 9 to 12, spread out over an area of more than 660,000 square kilometres. The website is an integral component of the initiative, fostering meaningful conversations across the province, wherever and whenever participants want to contribute.

As the primary communication tool for *Speak Out*, the website features an incredibly active student-driven discussion board, a daily blog, weekly polls, monthly contests and up-to-date information on the Annual *Speak Out* Conference and the Minister's Student Advisory Council. The website also provides an opportunity for Ministry of Education staff to speak directly to students.

This past year, discussion forums were hosted by various units and branches within Alberta Education, including Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans; Career and Technology Studies; Professional Standards; International Education; Arts, Communications and Citizenship; and Cross-Ministry Services.

Online conversations focused on concern over formal assessment and testing, exploring more flexibility in learning and schedules, the role and usefulness of homework, handling growing stress and pressure, finding the relevance in what is being taught, fostering productive relationships with teachers and peers, and preparing for the future after graduation.

Speak Out Forums

Speak Out forums give Alberta Education the opportunity to speak directly to students about their education. In conducting forums with students in Grades 9 to 12 this year, we used the unique graphic facilitation process that was developed in 2008, with continued success.

According to this process, each *Speak Out* forum is conducted in a workshop format, with students working in small groups. The forum takes three hours to complete and includes a number of team-building games to get the small groups feeling comfortable and confident about working with each other. Students are asked to discuss their educational experiences and share what is working, what is not, and what both students and adults can do to improve how education looks and feels. At the conclusion of each *Speak Out* forum, the data is collated and presented in a three-page "What We Heard" report. The report is sent to all forum participants, the school administration and the district administration, as well as posted on the *Speak Out* website for public access.

"We used the Speak Out Forum DVD Tool Kit to conduct forums in several school within our division. All in all, it was a terrific activity and yielded some interesting and useful data that we plan to use to drive our future plans, particularly in regard to our AISI project."[3]

The *Speak Out* team[1] conducted 25 *Speak Out* forums in the 2009–2010 school year and spoke to almost 1,000 students. We sought diverse perspectives and experiences by conducting forums in all varieties of schools, including public, separate, private, charter and francophone schools, and by engaging rural, urban, northern, First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI), at-risk and immigrant youth.

In October 2009 the *Speak Out* team launched the DVD toolkit. This Telly Award-winning[2] educational program was created in response to the overwhelming requests for *Speak Out* forums to be delivered across the province. The toolkit allows any school or group of students anywhere in Alberta to independently lead its own *Speak Out* forum. *Speak Out* provides all the supplies necessary to host a forum and includes a self-addressed stamped envelope so hosts can send their results to Alberta Education. Once we receive the results, we collate them into a three-page "What We Heard" report, which we distribute to forum participants and school leadership, and post online. During the 2009–2010 school year, students led 45 *Speak Out* forums using the DVD toolkit, engaging an additional 1,300 students.

At the *Speak Out* forums, students said that when they are learning at their best, they are able to learn in a variety of ways and they have a comfortable learning environment. When asked what is holding them back, they pointed to ineffective teaching styles and stress. When asked what adults can do to improve how education looks and feels, they said adults (parents/guardians and teachers) should communicate with them more effectively and more frequently, and adapt to students' personalized learning styles. Finally, when asked what actions students can take to improve how education looks and feels, students said they should take responsibility for their own education by studying more, paying attention and supporting each other.

The *Speak Out* forums were an incredible opportunity to let students know they have a voice and that decision makers not only want to hear it, but need to hear it.

1 The *Speak Out* team is comprised of three full-time Alberta Education staff members.

2 Founded in 1978, the Telly Awards annually showcase the best work of the most respected advertising agencies, production companies, television stations, cable operators, interactive agencies and corporate video departments in the world. The Telly Awards receive over 13,000 entries annually from all 50 states and from countries around the world. This year, *Speak Out* won four Tellys in the following categories:

- Best Educational Program—for the *Speak Out* DVD toolkit
- Best Use of Animation—for the *Speak Out* DVD toolkit
- Best Use of Graphics—for the *Speak Out* DVD toolkit
- Best Public Service Announcement

Winning these awards in a competition that included submissions by industry giants such as Disney, TSN, Time Warner Cable and Harpo Studios was a significant honour for the *Speak Out* team.

3 This report shows all quotations from participants' contributions to *Speak Out* as originally written, with no changes to spelling or grammar.

Annual *Speak Out* Conference

The Annual *Speak Out* Conference was designed to bring together diverse students from across Alberta to discuss the issues they face in their schools and their communities. The most common suggestion we heard in speaking to thousands of students during the *Speak Out* launch year was that students were seeking improved and more meaningful relationships with their educators. In response to this suggestion, the *Speak Out* team invited Alberta educators to participate in the second Annual *Speak Out* Conference along with students.

The conference thus allowed youth and educators to come together to discuss their perspectives and ideas on how to improve education. Each group participated in its own *Speak Out* forum. Participants also took part in various leadership and professional development sessions.

We found a number of common themes in the results from the student and educator *Speak Out* forums:

- When asked what it looks like when they are learning or teaching at their best, both groups identified student engagement, passion, motivation, a positive learning environment, and flexibility and adaptability.
- When asked what is holding them back from learning or teaching at their best, both groups identified volume of work, assessment practices, ineffective distribution of resources, and apathy and student attendance.
- When asked what actions adults can take to improve how education looks and feels, both students and educators suggested building strong relationships, sharing responsibility and involvement, personalizing learning for students, using education funds more effectively, holding teachers accountable and having a vision for the future of education.
- Lastly, when asked what actions students can take to improve how education looks and feels, both groups suggested that students should take initiative and ownership of their learning, be respectful, have a good attitude and create a positive school culture.

Minister's Student Advisory Council

The Minister's Student Advisory Council brings together a group of 24 youths, ages 14 to 19, to meet with the Minister of Education several times per year to discuss relevant educational issues in their communities. Students apply annually from across the province, and the *Speak Out* team seeks to engage a diverse sample of students.

Once selected, the council members act as ambassadors for *Speak Out* in their communities and in their schools. In preparation for their meetings with the Minister, council members use the DVD toolkit to conduct *Speak Out* forums in their schools. Under the guidance of the *Speak Out* team, council members participate in a number of development opportunities, including training in leadership, communication, media and facilitation.

Interest in the student voice and student engagement continues to grow across the province and across Canada. Decision makers are discovering that listening to the student voice can enhance the effectiveness of efforts to improve student learning and success by gaining early student commitment and giving restructuring work the right focus. It can provide valuable lenses for educators to see whether their reform efforts are successful. The student voice can challenge adults to examine their own assumptions about student learning through the eyes of students and treat students as responsible agents of change rather than products of change.

Speak Out – the Alberta Student Engagement Initiative looks forward to continuing to support students, teachers, schools, administrators and decision makers in fostering student engagement in the 2010–2011 school year. Alberta Education remains committed to hearing the voices of young people and valuing the information they provide by taking action on their ideas.

> "Meeting the Minister and having the opportunity to present the youth perspective is definitely a highlight—it makes a huge difference when there is something to reaffirm that 'the youth voice is REALLY being heard'."

☞ **visit speakout.alberta.ca**

The Website

Speak Out's website, which includes moderated and interactive discussion boards and a daily blog, went live on November 3, 2008. Although many provinces in Canada have youth and student engagement initiatives, *Speak Out* is unique in that it is the only initiative with an interactive online presence, which allows students to discuss education issues and concerns and to brainstorm recommendations and solutions with their peers across the province. Because the website is moderated, every post is reviewed by human eyes prior to posting to ensure relevance, privacy, anonymity and safety.

What Happened

The *Speak Out* website features a daily blog, student-generated discussion boards, information on the Annual *Speak Out* Conference and the Minister's Student Advisory Council, summaries of each *Speak Out* forum, weekly poll questions, and information on contests and sponsors. The "Discuss" page allows students to create their own discussion topics, view the archive of discussion posts and respond to ongoing conversations. The discussion section is divided into several "forums" created by the *Speak Out* team, including monthly forums that feature various themes. When students register on the website, they can create a personal profile, complete with an avatar and a signature sign-off. Registered members can then create their own topics under the forums to chat with other students across Alberta about their school experiences and their education. Discussion topics vary immensely across the forums—from what kind of music is best for studying, to suggestions for improving the curriculum. Students enjoy being able to connect and speak out with peers, as the tremendous response to the website has shown.

Our community rules are:

- Keep it relevant
- Keep it respectful
- Keep it safe (no names, no places, no schools, no contact info, no URLs)
- Keep an open mind
- Keep it clean

Speak Out Discussions » Speak Out here! » Open Mic

4 pages: [1] 2 3 4

Open Mic

Topics	Topic Starter	Replies	Views	Last Post
Healthy schools = less funding for student council		5	239	Wednesday, July 21, 2010 9:53 PM
Does your Administration ignore you?		7	232	Wednesday, July 21, 2010 9:38 PM
Exuses...Exuses. Sick and Tired of The Exuses		13	272	Monday, July 19, 2010 2:55 PM
New Math... what is going on?		9	469	Sunday, July 18, 2010 10:27 PM
Diploma Exams [Goto Page: 1, 2, 3]		48	2,001	Sunday, July 18, 2010 10:20 PM
Too much or not enough?		0	45	Tuesday, July 06, 2010 1:33 AM
should teachers have a career/job before becoming teachers?		10	281	Monday, July 05, 2010 1:36 PM
Summer school		1	52	Sunday, July 04, 2010 6:54 PM
Diploma Exam Question?		0	67	Friday, June 25, 2010 9:57 PM
Physical Activity at School		17	469	Tuesday, June 22, 2010 1:27 PM
En Francais!		6	437	Friday, June 18, 2010 2:17 PM
GLBT Dropout Rates		6	445	Thursday, June 17, 2010 10:19 PM
Political Correctness		14	762	Thursday, June 17, 2010 9:57 PM
Are You Tired of Haveing Little Room in Your Classroom?		5	182	Tuesday, June 08, 2010 11:14 PM
Why can't we		4	362	Tuesday, June 01, 2010 11:42 AM

SPEAK OUT
ALBERTA STUDENT ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

What We Heard

The Minister Wants to Know

Honourable Dave Hancock, Minister of Education, supported a four-part series, The Minister Wants to Know. This series included a video from the Minister, and forums on the following topics:

- Part One... What motivates you to attend school?
- Part Two... How can technology be used to improve your school experience?
- Part Three... How can we engage students in creating safe, caring and strong learning environments?
- Part Four... What are your thoughts on effective teaching and what would help you in the classroom?

The following is a summary of the major themes discussed in the web forums for The Minister Wants to Know.

Part One...

What motivates you to attend school?

- The key motivation to attend school is to see friends and meet new people.
- Students are motivated when learning is practical and connected to real life, is active through class discussions and involves creative projects and hands-on activities.
- Students are motivated when teachers are interested and passionate about a subject, and go beyond the curriculum or textbook.
- School is boring when you are just learning from a textbook, taking notes and sitting for long periods of time without interaction.
- To continue to be motivated beyond high school, students require access to career programs and counsellors, tutoring, academic and extracurricular activities, and support from teachers.

> "I get up every day not only because I get to go and see my friends, it is a necessary step towards getting the career that I dream of having."

Part Two...

How can technology be used to improve your school experience?

- Technology is critical to students' future and should be embraced for learning.
- A variety of technology is currently used in the classroom, including computers, laptops, email, SMART Boards, video conferencing, etc.
- Technology allows online information sharing, and enhances the ability to do research and collect information on current events.

- Technology has added a new dimension to learning but should be viewed as a supplement to teaching, not a replacement for it.
- Technology must be monitored to ensure this privilege is not being abused.
- Teachers must be properly trained in the use of technology.
- Technology must be funded appropriately.

Part Three...

How can we engage students in creating safe, caring and strong learning environments?

- To create safe, caring and strong learning environments, students need strong support systems (e.g., of caseworkers, counsellors, school resource officers, etc.) that are adequately resourced and visible to students, and that accommodate their needs.
- Teachers must lead by example, have enthusiasm and foster teacher-student relations.
- Students must be inspired, trusted and given more freedom to act.

Part Four...

What are your thoughts on effective teaching and what would help you in the classroom?

- Effective teaching is characterized by teachers who care and who inspire students' passion to learn.
- Teachers need to take an interest in students and their success, and to prepare students for the next phase of their lives.
- Teachers should go beyond the curriculum, share their own experience and real-life examples, initiate class discussion, set clear expectations, and take the time to ensure students understand before moving on to other topics.
- To be successful, students need enhanced preparation for post-secondary education, which includes effort from both students and teachers to expand their knowledge base, flexibility in learning styles, and proper discipline for those who disrupt class or disobey rules.

Student voice

"Several principles to remember about technology in classrooms: 1) they don't interrupt others, 2) they're not used to cheat in any way, and 3) they pertain to learning."

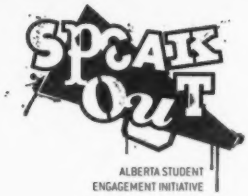
"Teachers could encourage better learning environments, but students are the ones responsible for creating those."

"Teaching is imparting knowledge on students, igniting a desire to learn, and showing students how to learn on their own as well."

Featured Forums

The *Speak Out* website hosted featured forums supported by other branches within Alberta Education:

Date	Featured Forum	Hosted By
May to October 2009	Annual *Speak Out* Conference 2009	Student Engagement
June to October 2009	Inspiring Education	Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans
September 2009	Pathways to Possibilities	Career and Technology Studies
October 2009	What Makes a Good Teacher	Professional Standards
November 2009	Going Global (Again!)	International Education
December 2009	Bringing Arts Education Into the 21st Century	Arts, Communications and Citizenship
January 2010	Youth Homelessness	Cross-Ministry Services



The following is a summary of the major themes discussed in the Featured Forums.

Inspiring Education

- Grades are important, and are a way to reward students for their work, but grades do not necessarily correlate with a student's future or career.
- Schools provide a well-rounded education with the key subjects as priorities; option classes are important and valuable, and should continue.
- Most students agree that 12 years is the right amount of time for schooling in Canada, taking into account that students mature at different rates (and if students require more time, upgrading is an option).
- The amount of required class time depends on the particular class; breaks are always appreciated.
- Individualized student learning inspires a student's initiative, innovation and responsibility—this results in student ownership and leads to greater motivation, interest and success.
- School is where students learn the basic skills and knowledge to prepare for their careers; school should be a privilege and opportunity for both student and teachers, and balance between structure and freedom.
- Students learn through a hands-on approach, visually and kinetically, through assignments and creative projects, by listening, by applying concepts at their own place and by taking notes.

Pathways to Possibilities

- Students would like to see work experience options, to "test" potential careers.
- Option courses are very important in helping students explore potential careers; extracurricular activities and school clubs can also assist in developing career interests.
- Opportunities in high school to get specialized skills or post-secondary certifications include mechanics courses, Alberta Distance Learning Centre (ADLC) courses, Career and Technology Studies (CTS) courses, and the Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP); small and rural schools require better access to CTS and RAP courses.
- CTS courses are great for all students, including those who want a career in a specific CTS area or those who just want to explore and gain additional skills.
- CTS and ADLC courses should be expanded to include more career choices.

Student voice

"My learning style is a combination of visual and kinetic. For example, when I'm studying, I read from the textbook and then also make notes or draw pictures such as mind maps/webs."

"I think that to be a teacher, you need to have a love of not only student but of helping people change their lives forever."

"Teachers who are able to connect what are we learning in the classroom to the outside world = AWESOME!"

"One of the best ways to learn is to experience it for yourself."

"I think fine arts are great for problem-solving. If you mess up something while painting, you need to either give up and scrap it, or be flexible and change the intended outcome."

What Makes a Good Teacher

- Teachers need to be:
  - Outgoing, friendly and optimistic
  - Knowledgeable and passionate about their subject, and able to relate the curriculum to the outside world
  - Open to having class discussions, able to adapt to changes "on the fly" and willing to try something new
  - Knowledgeable about the technology used in the classroom
  - Creative in developing their own unique teaching strategy and in combining various learning styles
- Teachers need to:
  - Understand how to control the classroom, but also treat students as adults
  - Relate to students and make them feel good about themselves, be sensitive to students' needs and provide a strong support network when needed
  - Connect to students and build a professional student-teacher relationship within and beyond the classroom
- There is an opportunity to create a CTS course focused on teaching. The course could include organizational skills, teaching plans, strategies for marking certain assignments (such as essays), self-confidence, assertiveness and the use of up-to-date technology.

Going Global (Again!)

- Some schools offer school trips to Europe, India, Africa, South America, etc., but some students said these are not offered at their schools.
- Students support having various exchange programs and opportunities to learn about different ways of life and cultures.
- Students would like to see some government financial assistance to support student exchanges.
- Some schools incorporate international education into the classroom through world literature, documentaries, having teachers from other countries and culture-related student groups.

"The hardest part of creating your own programming is trying to fit everything into your schedule."

Bringing Arts Education Into the 21st Century

- Arts use a different area of the brain, focus on the "why" rather than the "how," and teach self-discipline and patience, as well as oratory and aesthetic design.
- No changes are needed to the current fine arts curriculum, but there are issues with funding and accessibility in smaller and rural schools, and concerns over potential cuts to hours.
- Most students said that arts credits should not be mandatory because, while arts do help foster creativity, they are not well-suited to all students.
- Students said credits should apply only to extracurricular activities that are directly or indirectly related to a course offered in high school; coaches or teachers would need to decide if credits were appropriate.
- Fine arts can lead to a career as a music teacher (for example, giving private lessons) or a professional musician.

Youth Homelessness

- Youth could become homeless as a result of family issues, financial problems, addictions, mental health or abuse issues within their families (potentially related to sexuality), or an inability to get along with their parents.
- Youth homelessness is an issue in which different levels of government and various institutions need to get involved, and adults need to fully understand youth issues to respond to them appropriately.
- Schools need to teach "real-life skills," such as handling credit cards, rent, food, bills, health care, savings, etc., which may help youth to be on their own.
- One suggestion was to set up a support centre to provide for basic needs (shelter, food, security) while also helping youth become independent in terms of job, education, access to health care, etc.
- Another suggestion was to raise more money, including government funding, for youth homeless shelters, and to connect youth with programs that focus on work or job training.
- In dealing with homeless youth, students suggest showing compassion, referring the student to a guidance counsellor or a teacher to access the right resources, and creating awareness—on an ongoing basis—of organizations that work with homeless youth within schools.
- Students provided many examples of community organizations they are aware of that assist youth with housing and homelessness.

> "One of the challenges is how we make sure that school staff and young people know of the resources and how to get to them so they CAN help other young people to find them when they need them."

General Discussion Forums

From June 1, 2009, to April 30, 2010, the *Speak Out* website featured general discussion forums created by the *Speak Out* administration, including:

- School Atmosphere
- In the Classroom
- The Future
- Open Mic

The following is a summary of the major themes discussed in the General Discussion Forums.

School Atmosphere

- Instilling a sense of pride in their schools encourages students to show respect and work toward keeping the school clean.
- Students prefer a five-day school week to ensure the proper amount of instruction.
- Rules are necessary to protect students but should not be too restrictive—students need to learn how to handle responsibility on their own and must have some freedom.
- A more casual teacher-student relationship enhances school atmosphere.
- Oral testing should be offered as an option to students.

In the Classroom

- Students gave mixed reviews on whether they should be able to switch classes to align with a preferred teacher or teaching style; the logistics of this would be difficult.
- Core subjects and assignments need more "creativity."
- Provincial achievement tests (PATs) should be used only in later grades (removed from Grades 3 and 6).
- Teachers should be properly evaluated; however, students need to take responsibility for their learning.
- Summer school is more suited to subjects that are less difficult or in-depth.

The Future

- Decisions about post-secondary will play a large role in a student's life; it's important for students to research and ask a variety of questions to support their post-secondary choices.
- Homework is intended as a form of practice to help the student understand the subject. A "balanced" amount of homework should be assigned to ensure time for social and extracurricular activities.
- Many students feel pressures today, but some feel that students just put pressure upon themselves. To manage pressure, students should use their support network of teachers, parents, school counsellors, etc.

Student voice

"I find it easier to learn from someone that I relate to as a person."

"It's more upon us than ever to find our own ways of being creative than merely being instructed to be creative."

"I think that it is important to have a career picked out in high school so that you can take all the right classes and start thinking about applying to the appropriate schools and scholarships."

"If the teacher establishes a strong connection with his or her students and shows them respect, such behavior will be reciprocated."

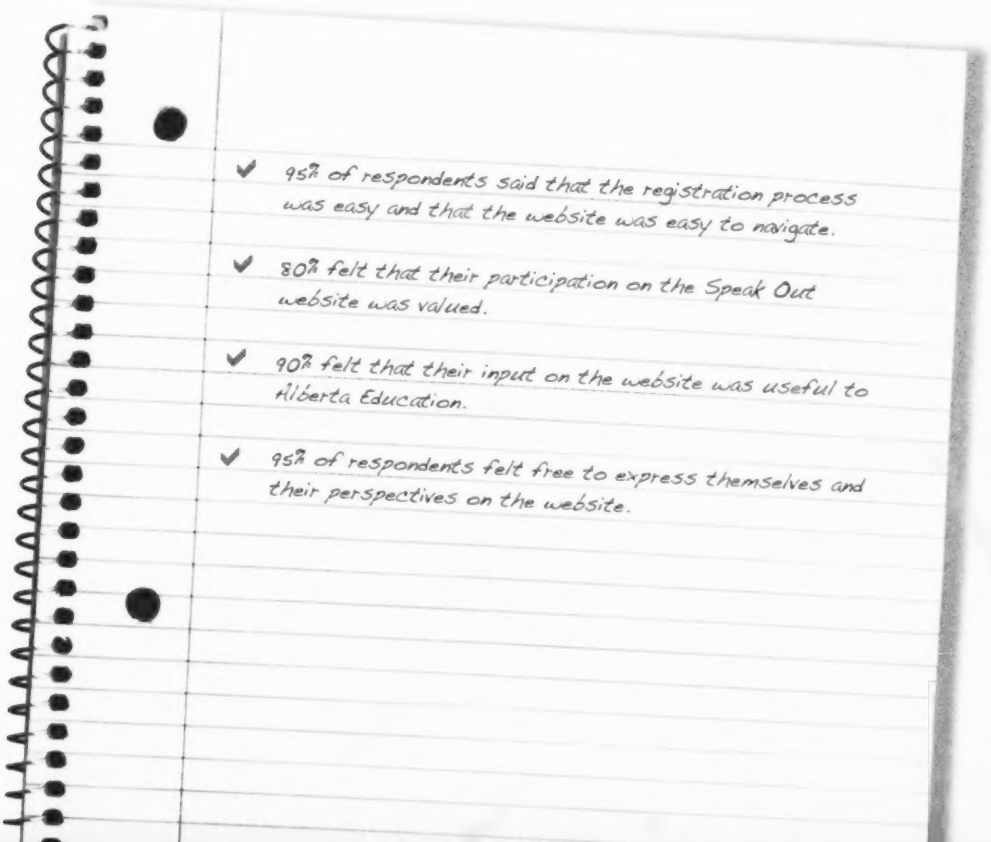
Open Mic

- Access to sports and training equipment and a variety of competitive, non-competitive and non-traditional programming is the key to physical activity.
- Homework should be assigned in moderation.
- Perhaps society has gone too far with being politically correct—sometimes students need to discuss the issues that are important to them.
- Facebook should be kept separate from schools.
- There is a two-way relationship between teachers and students—teachers need to create the conditions and environment for students to learn, and students need to put in the effort to learn what they can.
- Additional student assistants, educational assistants and teaching assistants are required to support teachers.

> "We may thrive on competition but we cannot reach our full potential without cooperation."

How We Did

At the conclusion of the school year, we surveyed users asking for feedback on the *Speak Out* website. Selected responses are listed below:


✔ 95% of respondents said that the registration process was easy and that the website was easy to navigate.
✔ 80% felt that their participation on the Speak Out website was valued.
✔ 90% felt that their input on the website was useful to Alberta Education.
✔ 95% of respondents felt free to express themselves and their perspectives on the website.

Speak Out Forums

Speak Out Forums

Speak Out forums provided the opportunity for the *Speak Out* team to speak directly to students about their education. Between October 2009 and March 2010, the *Speak Out* team conducted 25 forums, and students led another 45 forums using the *Speak Out* DVD toolkit. The step-by-step DVD toolkit was designed to allow anyone to host a *Speak Out* forum any time and any place. This approach has not only built local capacity and local engagement, but has also enabled more students to find their voice and speak out. Between the student-led and *Speak Out* team-led forums, 2,236 students in 29 of the 62 school districts participated. At these *Speak Out* forums, the *Speak Out* team made a concerted effort to engage students from the various educational systems in Alberta, including public, separate, private, charter, and francophone schools. The *Speak Out* team sought diverse perspectives and experiences by engaging rural, urban, northern, First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI), at-risk and immigrant youth.

At each forum, students were broken up into small working groups and were asked to discuss their educational experiences and share what's working, what isn't, and what both students and adults can do to improve how education looks and feels.

At the *Speak Out* forums, students said they learn at their best when they can learn in a variety of ways and have a comfortable learning environment. When asked what is holding them back, they pointed to ineffective teaching styles and stress. When asked what adults can do to improve how education looks and feels, they said adults (parents/guardians and teachers) should communicate with them more effectively and more frequently, and adapt to students' personalized learning styles. Finally, when asked what actions students can take to improve how education looks and feels, the students said they should take responsibility for their own education by studying more, paying attention and supporting each other.

The *Speak Out* forums were an incredible opportunity to let students know they have a voice and that decision makers not only want to hear it, but need to hear it.

"We kept hearing positive comments from students for the rest of the day! They felt that their opinions and thoughts were taken seriously…and they had fun! Successful day!"

"Kudos to the Speak Out team for another fantastic opportunity for youth to share their individual and collective voice. Your accepting and dynamic presentation style encouraged participants to share their personal and passionate insights regarding their schooling experience. These students, in giving voice, perceive they have genuine and authentic value and are thus engaged in the process. I am always amazed at the heartfelt dialogue students share. The trustees indicated this forum was very powerful to them and that it supported the work of their division three year education plan."

ALBERTA STUDENT ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

Where We Were

Below is a list of the locations of fall 2009 and spring 2010 forums led by the *Speak Out* team. For a detailed list of forum dates and participating schools, please refer to Appendix A.

Speak Out Team Forums:

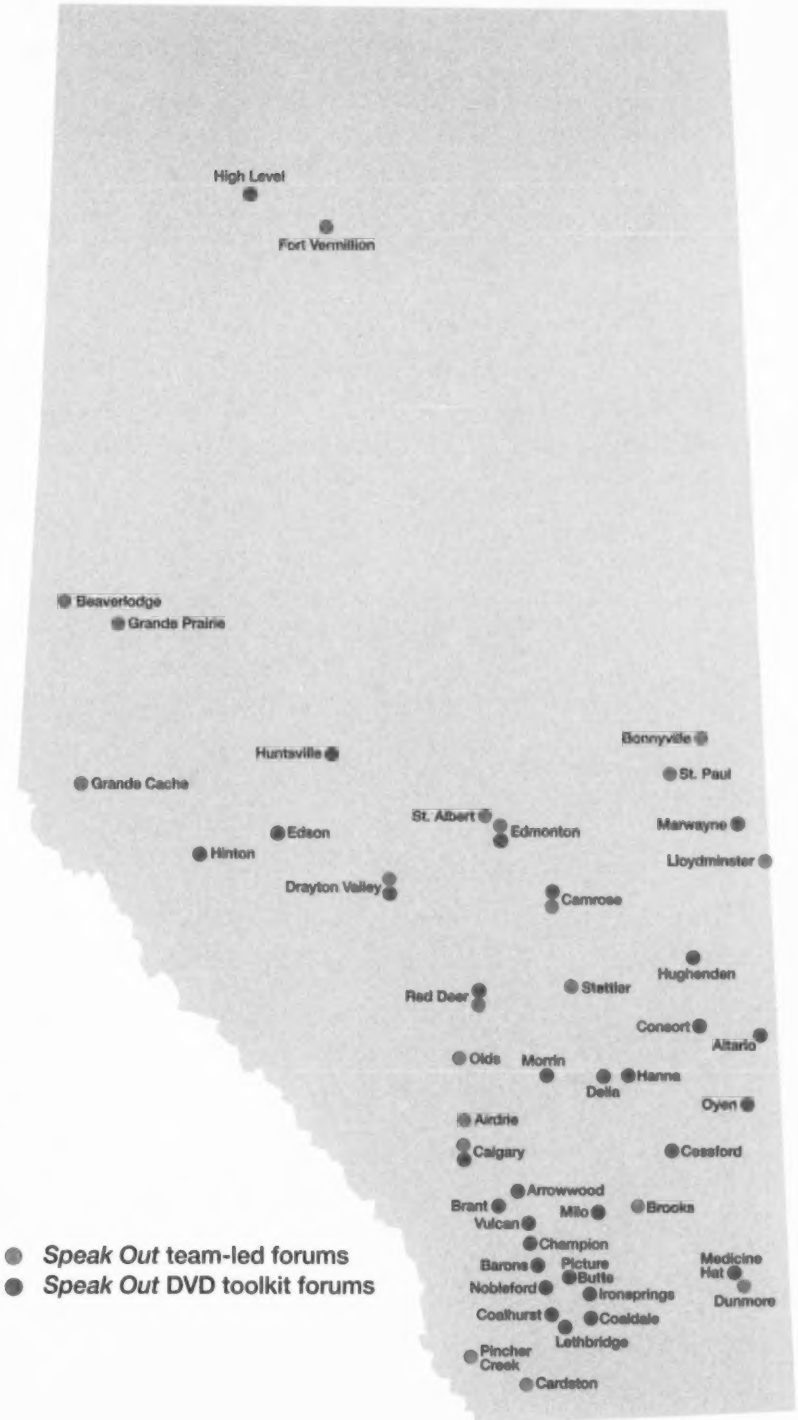
- Airdrie
- Beaverlodge
- Bonnyville
- Brooks
- Calgary (3)
- Camrose
- Cardston
- Drayton Valley
- Dunmore
- Edmonton (3)
- Fort Vermilion
- Grande Cache
- Grande Prairie (2)
- Lloydminster
- Olds
- Pincher Creek
- Red Deer
- St. Albert
- St. Paul (2)

Below is a list of the locations of fall 2009 and spring 2010 forums led by students across Alberta using the *Speak Out* DVD toolkit from October 1, 2009 to March 31, 2010. For a detailed list of forum dates and participating schools, please refer to Appendix A.

Speak Out DVD Toolkit Forums:

- Altario
- Arrowwood
- Barons
- Brant
- Calgary (8)
- Camrose
- Cessford
- Champion
- Coaldale (2)
- Coalhurst
- Consort (2)
- Delia
- Drayton Valley
- Edmonton (5)
- Edson
- Hanna (2)
- High Level
- Hughenden (2)
- Huntsville
- Iron Springs
- Lethbridge
- Marwayne
- Medicine Hat
- Milo
- Morrin
- Nobleford
- Oyen
- Picture Butte
- Red Deer
- Vulcan

> "The students truly were able to run the forum themselves with the guidance of the DVD and its timers. The games really warmed up the kids and prepared them to talk to each other. Thank you for a very well-designed easy-to-use package."



Student voice

"The addition of SMART Boards to our classrooms has added a new dimension to education. It is interactive and appeals to the various learning styles of students. It can also help make lessons more engaging and memorable."

"School is all that you make of it."

ALBERTA STUDENT ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

Who We Spoke To

At the beginning of each *Speak Out* forum, students were asked a series of "getting to know you" questions. At the *Speak Out* team-led forums, we used an audience response system to collect responses anonymously. Results were then shown using percentages and graphs. This process allowed the students to become comfortable with the technology for later in the facilitation process and for the feedback portion of the forum.

For the forums conducted using the *Speak Out* DVD toolkit, each student filled out a student information questionnaire titled "Who's in the Room?". The following demographic percentages are based on an average of the responses collected, both electronically and through the questionnaire, from the 2,236 participating students in the 70 *Speak Out* forums. A complete list of questions and results is below.

1) I am a...

Guy – 47%
Girl – 53%

2) I am in Grade...

9 – 34%
10 – 21%
11 – 22%
12 – 23%

3) I'm on Facebook, MySpace or Twitter.

Yes – 84%
No – 16%

4) I have (#) people listed as friends or contacts on these social networking sites.

None – 16%
1–99 – 10%
100–249 – 33%
250–499 – 32%
500 or more – 9%

5) I usually do about (#) hours of homework on an average night.

0 – 35%
1 – 41%
2 – 16%
3 – 4%
4 or more – 3%

6) I am involved in... (students selected top two answers)

Fine arts – 12%
Drama – 9%
School club(s) – 9%
Sports team(s) – 44%
Leadership – 15%
Music – 19%
Yearbook – 3%
Other – 72%

7) I am physically active (work out, play on a sports team, etc.).

Yes – 82%
No – 18%

8) I volunteer.

Yes – 60%
No – 40%

9) I have a part-time job.

Yes – 43%
No – 57%

10) At my part-time job, I work about (#) hours each week.

0 – 57%
1–10 – 19%
11–20 – 15%
21–30 – 6%
30 or more – 3%

11) I usually get (#) hours of sleep on an average night.

Less than 5 – 8%
5 – 8%
6 – 19%
7 – 29%
8 – 22%
More than 8 – 13%

12) I speak a second language.

Yes – 43%
No – 57%

13) I go to school each day because... (students selected top two answers)

I enjoy it – 9%
My parents make me – 12%
Of my friends – 20%
There's nothing else to do – 3%
I want to get skills for a job – 13%
I want to get my high school diploma – 22%
I want to stay out of trouble – 1%
Of what I learn in classes – 3%
Of extracurricular activities (fine arts, drama, sports, clubs, etc.) – 10%
I want to go to college or university – 40%

14) I learn best by... (students selected top two answers)

Listening – 16%
Seeing – 28%
Doing – 48%
Working with others – 20%
Working independently – 18%
Using technology – 9%

What Happened

In preparation for each *Speak Out* forum, the *Speak Out* team worked with the leadership of each school to ensure that a diverse student population would participate in the session. The *Speak Out* team asked for a group of students that represented the voices of all provincial youth, from all different backgrounds—ranging from the academic keeners to those who struggle in school, from those who are into sports to those who love the arts, and everything in between.

At the beginning of each *Speak Out* forum, an overview of *Speak Out* – the Alberta Student Engagement Initiative was provided. Students were separated into working groups with one table leader. The table leader helped the students keep on task and capture their findings.

Each *Speak Out* forum included activities and games for team development within each working group. These team-building activities were interspersed throughout the facilitation questions.

The Facilitation

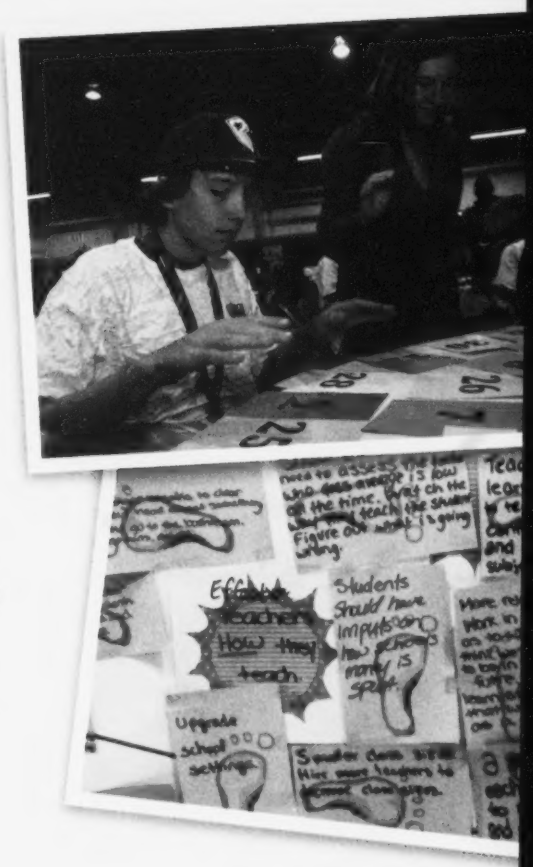
The *Speak Out* forum process included individual and group brainstorming, clustering of similar ideas, theming, and voting. Small working groups of up to 10 students were formed for the facilitation process. The groups captured thoughts and recommendations resulting from each question.

The participants were asked to respond to the following four prompts:

1. What does it look like when you are learning at your best?
2. What is holding you back from learning at your best?
3. What actions can adults take to improve how education looks and feels?
4. What actions can students take to improve how education looks and feels?

The facilitation process involved the following steps:

1. Individual brainstorming: Each student came up with several ideas and wrote down one idea per sticky note.
2. Group brainstorming: In working groups, each participant shared his or her two or three most important ideas, and the group discussed them.
3. Clustering ideas: The working group clustered similar thoughts.
4. Naming the clusters: The group named each cluster by its main idea or theme.
5. Identifying two themes: Each group chose two themes to be posted.
6. Forum group voting: Each participant voted on all the themes identified, choosing two ideas as the most important.



SPEAK OUT
ALBERTA STUDENT ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

"Our Speak Out Forum was so successful. The students had a great time ("it was sooo fun!") and I know they felt respected for having the opportunity to express their opinions. I would like to thank the individuals who put together the whole DVD package – obviously they understand the needs of teachers. The box of supplies was so well organized, with everything already sorted into bags for each table - an appreciated time-saver. The "Watch Me First" video made it easy to give a quick overview of duties to the hosts and Table Leaders. The instructions and supplies in the leaders' folders were very clear. And finally, the DVD host (Junk-Food Jen) was excellent."

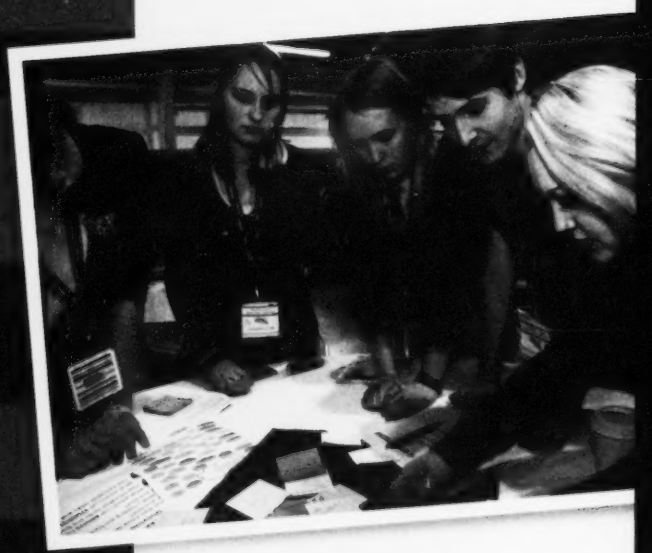
What We Heard

Below, we provide more information about each prompt that summarizes the voices that consistently arose from each *Speak Out* forum. The table lists the themes in order of importance as ranked by students, and provides more detailed explanations of each.

Prompt one: What does it look like when you are learning at your best?

The purpose of this prompt was to identify the conditions and tools required for optimal learning. Students were encouraged to consider how they learn best, both in school and in their personal lives.

Theme	Examples of the Student Voice* When Students Are Learning at Their Best
Personalized learning	• Hands-on learning • Group discussions • Using technology • Creative forms of learning • Teachers tailoring lesson plans to the class • Teachers trying to meet student needs • Learning at your own pace • Learning using your preferred style
Having a comfortable learning environment	• Smaller class sizes • Listening to music
Having quality teachers	• Enthusiastic teachers • Engaging teachers • Passionate teachers • Teachers with a positive attitude • Teachers who are knowledgeable in subject matter
Students taking ownership of their education	• Making an effort • Self-motivation • Being prepared • Being focused • Having a positive attitude
Positive student-teacher relationships	• Respectful teachers • Supportive teachers • Approachable and helpful teachers • Compassionate teachers
Material and topics that are relevant and interesting	• Interesting curriculum • Material that is relevant to our generation • Material that prepares students for the future
Minimal distractions	• Minimized distractions in school and in class • Minimized in-school stress (homework, deadlines) • Minimized out-of-school distractions (family, TV, Internet, friends)
Having a reasonable workload and managing time	• Manageable homework load • Class time for work • Reasonable exam schedules
Having access to resources	• Easy access to references (notes, materials, examples)



*These themes are taken directly from student input and are listed in order of importance as ranked by students.

SPEAK OUT
ALBERTA STUDENT ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

Prompt two: What is holding you back from learning at your best?

The purpose of this prompt was to have students reflect on the boundaries or limitations that prevent them from reaching their individual "optimal learning."

Theme	Examples of the Student Voice* What Is Holding Them Back From Learning at Their Best
Ineffective teaching style	• Teachers who are unfamiliar with the subject matter • Poor time management • Lack of control in the classroom • Pace of teaching not meeting student needs • Overemphasis on grades
Stress	• Heavy workloads with tight and conflicting deadlines • Diploma exam weighting (50%) • Life outside of school • Too much homework • Pressure and expectations from self and others • Competition • Planning for the future
Ineffective learning environment	• Distractions in class • Uncomfortable physical environment • Large class size
Distractions	• Drama • Friend and family relationships • TV • Internet • Lack of sleep
Poor relationships with adults (parents/guardians and teachers)	• Impatience • Lack of communication • Lack of support • Showing favouritism • High expectations
Inflexible class schedules	• Lack of choices for classes and times of classes • Starting too early
Lack of self-motivation and discipline	• Poor time management • Procrastination
Lack of interest in content being taught	• Boredom • Uninteresting topics • Irrelevant curriculum

*These themes are taken directly from student input and are listed in order of importance as ranked by students.

"The Speak Out team were highly accessible and hugely helpful. With the kits that were provided, the forums were extremely easy to organize and implement. All the materials were provided in the kits, and all necessary instructions were included."

Prompt three: What actions can adults take to improve how education looks and feels?

The purpose of this prompt was to allow students to be creative and provide solutions or strategies that adults could undertake for overcoming the obstacles, boundaries or limitations identified in the discussion on the second prompt ("What is holding you back from learning at your best?"). Students were asked to provide as many solutions as possible.

Theme	Student Suggestions for Adult Action*
Communicate effectively and frequently with students	• Be supportive. • Teachers: give feedback to students. • Understand students' stress, schedules and needs, and the demands they face. • Make yourself available to help students when they need it.
Adapt to students' personalized learning styles	• Make learning interesting and fun. • Ask students how they want to learn. • Adapt to individuals' work pace needs. • Teachers: use different forms of evaluation.
Allow for more flexible scheduling and better time management	• Offer more courses and choices for timing. • Give class time to do homework.
Provide more funding to education	• Provide funding for more resources—sports equipment, technology, updated facilities, etc.
Reduce the importance placed on diploma exams	• Reduce weighting of diploma exams.
Make the curriculum more relevant	• Modernize the curriculum. • Prepare students for university and the real world. • Encourage creativity.
Create a positive learning environment	• Put a stop to bullying. • Reduce disruptions. • Provide a fun and safe environment.
Improve classroom organization	• Provide clear expectations. • Use effective time management.
Reward students for success	• Have a reward system for effort and regularly completing homework. • Pay students to go to school. • Use fun rewards (e.g., listening to iPods, going for walks, cell phones in class).
Improve parent/guardian-teacher communication	• Have parents/guardians and teachers communicate about student needs.

*These themes are taken directly from student input and are listed in order of importance as ranked by students.

Prompt four: What actions can students take to improve how education looks and feels?

The purpose of this prompt was to allow students to be creative and provide solutions or strategies that they, as students, can apply in order to overcome the obstacles, boundaries or limitations identified in the discussion on the second prompt ("What is holding you back from learning at your best?"). Students were asked to provide as many solutions as possible.

Theme	Student Suggestions for Student Actions*
Make an effort in our education	• Study more. • Pay attention. • Form good habits. • Take responsibility for your education.
Help and support our peers	• Show respect for others. • Mentor and tutor other students. • Encourage others.
Get involved and participate	• Get involved during class, in school clubs and in the community. • Participate in class activities.
Communicate	• Communicate with teachers, parents, guardians, peers and school administration about your needs and opinions. • Ask for help when you need it.
Bring a positive attitude	• Be open to new and different ideas. • Find motivation.
Manage our time	• Prioritize school and other activities. • Don't procrastinate.
Keep the future in mind	• Be more aware of post-secondary requirements. • Set goals and achieve them.
Maintain a healthy lifestyle	• Get proper rest, nutrition and exercise. • Avoid drugs and alcohol.

*These themes are taken directly from student input and are listed in order of importance as ranked by students.

The *Speak Out* team understands the importance of being open and transparent in this process. Within days of each *Speak Out* forum, the student-generated data was transcribed into a "What We Heard" document and posted on the *Speak Out* website. The document was also emailed to all forum participants and the school host.

How We Did

At the conclusion of each *Speak Out* forum delivered by the *Speak Out* team, we asked students a series of evaluation questions, using the audience response system to collect responses anonymously. The responses are listed below:

- ✔ 92% of students were glad to participate in the Speak Out forums.
- ✔ 88% found the discussions useful and relevant.
- ✔ 74% plan to talk to their friends about Speak Out.

Appendix A: *Speak Out* Team Forums

October 15, 2009 • Airdrie • Bert Church High School
School Board(s): Rocky View School Division No. 41

October 22, 2009 • Edmonton • Boyle Street Education Centre
School Board(s): N/A

October 27, 2009 • Grande Prairie • Grande Prairie Composite High School
School Board(s): Grande Prairie School District No. 2357

October 28, 2009 • Grande Prairie • Peace Wapiti Academy
School Board(s): Peace Wapiti School Division No. 76

October 29, 2009 • Beaverlodge • Beaverlodge Regional High School
School Board(s): Peace Wapiti School Division No. 76

November 3, 2009 • Drayton Valley • Holy Trinity Academy
School Board(s): St. Thomas Aquinas Roman Catholic Separate Regional Division No. 38

November 4, 2009 • Red Deer • École Lindsay Thurber Comprehensive High School
School Board(s): Red Deer Public School District No. 104

November 10, 2009 • Edmonton • Eastglen High School
School Board(s): Edmonton School District No. 7

November 18, 2009 • Cardston • Cardston High School
School Board(s): Westwind School Division No. 74

November 19, 2009 • Pincher Creek • St. Michael's School
School Board(s): Holy Spirit Roman Catholic Separate Regional District No. 4

February 9, 2010 • Grande Cache • Grande Cache Community High School
School Boards(s): Grande Yellowhead Regional Division No. 35

February 10, 2010 • Edmonton • Louis St. Laurent High School
School Board(s): Edmonton Catholic Separate School District No. 7

February 11, 2010 • St. Albert • Paul Kane High School
School Board(s): St. Albert Protestant Separate School District No. 6

February 17, 2010 • St. Paul • St. Paul Regional High School
School Board(s): St. Paul Education Regional District No. 1

February 18, 2010 • St. Paul • Ecole du Sommet
Participating Schools: École du Sommet (St. Paul), École Beauséjour (Plamondon), École des Beaux-Lacs (Bonnyville), and École Voyageur (Cold Lake)
School Board(s): East Central Francophone Education Region No. 3

February 22, 2010 • Calgary • Bishop O'Byrne High School
School Board(s): Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School District No. 1

February 23, 2010 • Calgary • Western Canada High School
School Board(s): Calgary School District No. 19

February 24, 2010 • Calgary • West Island College
School Board(s): N/A

February 25, 2010 • Olds • Olds High School
School Board(s): Chinook's Edge School Division No. 73

March 2, 2010 • Camrose • Camrose Composite High School
School Board(s): Battle River Regional Division No. 31

March 3, 2010 • Dunmore • Eagle Butte High School
School Board(s): Prairie Rose School Division No. 8

March 4, 2010 • Brooks • Brooks Composite High School
Participating Schools: Brooks Composite High School, Rosemary School, Duchess School, and Bassano School
School Board(s): Grasslands Regional Division No. 6

March 9, 2010 • Fort Vermilion • Fort Vermilion Public School
School Board(s): Fort Vermilion School Division No. 52

March 11, 2010 • Lloydminster • Lloydminster Composite High School
School Board(s): Lloydminster Public School Division

March 16, 2010 • Bonnyville • École Notre Dame High School
School Board(s): Lakeland Roman Catholic Separate School District No. 150

DVD Toolkit Forums (October 2009 to March 2010)*

October 30, 2009 • Marwayne • Marwayne Jubilee School
School Board(s): Buffalo Trail Public Schools Regional Division No. 28

November 2, 2009 • Brant • Brant Christian School
School Board(s): Palliser Regional Division No. 26

November 16, 2009 • Lethbridge • Catholic Central High School
School Board(s): Holy Spirit Roman Catholic Separate Regional Division No. 4

November 17, 2009 • Edmonton • École Maurice Lavallée
School Board(s): Greater North Central Francophone Education Region No. 2

November 18, 2009 • Hughenden • Hughenden Public School
School Board(s): Buffalo Trail Public Schools Regional Division No. 28

November 25, 2009 • Camrose • PACE Outreach
School Board(s): Battle River Regional Division No. 31

November 26, 2009 • High Level • High Level Public School
School Board(s): Fort Vermilion School Division No. 52

November 26, 2009 • Red Deer • École Secondaire Notre Dame High School
School Board(s): Red Deer Catholic Regional Division No. 39

December 14, 2010 • Nobleford • Noble Central School
School Board(s): Palliser Regional Division No. 26

December 14, 2010 • Coalhurst • Coalhurst High School
School Board(s): Palliser Regional Division No. 26

December 15, 2010 • Coaldale • John Davidson School
School Board(s): Palliser Regional Division No. 26

December 15, 2010 • Barons • Barons School
School Board(s): Palliser Regional Division No. 26

December 16, 2010 • Picture Butte • Picture Butte High School
School Board(s): Palliser Regional Division No. 26

December 17, 2010 • Champion • Champion Community School
School Board(s): Palliser Regional Division No. 26

December 17, 2010 • Vulcan • County Central High School
School Board(s): Palliser Regional Division No. 26

December 18, 2010 • Coaldale • Kate Andrews High School
School Board(s): Palliser Regional Division No. 26

December 2009 • Hanna • J.C. Charyk Hanna School
School Board(s): Palliser Regional Division No. 26

January 4, 2010 • Milo • Milo Community School
School Board(s): Palliser Regional Division No. 26

January 4, 2010 • Arrowwood • Arrowwood School
School Board(s): Palliser Regional Division No. 26

January 5, 2010 • Calgary • Glenmore Christian Academy
School Board(s): Palliser Regional Division No. 26

January 6, 2010 • Calgary • Menno Simons Christian School
School Board(s): Palliser Regional Division No. 26

January 6, 2010 • Calgary • Calgary Christian School
School Board(s): Palliser Regional Division No. 26

January 7, 2010 • Calgary • Heritage Christian Academy
School Board(s): Palliser Regional Division No. 26

January 7, 2010 • Calgary • Master's Academy and College
School Board(s): Palliser Regional Division No. 26

January 8, 2010 • Iron Springs • Huntsville School
School Board(s): Palliser Regional Division No. 26

January 18, 2010 • Calgary • Eastside Christian Academy
School Board(s): N/A

January 25, 2010 • Hughenden • Hughenden Public School
School Board(s): Buffalo Trail Public Schools Regional Division No. 28

February 1, 2010 • Altario • Altario School
School Board(s): Prairie Land Regional Division No. 25

February 8, 2010 • Drayton Valley • Frank Maddock High School
School Board(s): Wild Rose Public Schools

February 10, 2010 • Delia • Delia Jr. and Sr. High School
School Board(s): Prairie Land Regional Division No. 25

February 10, 2010 • Morrin • Morrin Jr. and Sr. High School
School Board(s): Prairie Land Regional Division No. 25

February 10, 2010 • Calgary • Dr. G.M. Egbert Junior High School
School Board(s): Calgary Board of Education

February 11, 2010 • Consort • Consort School and Veteran High School
School Board(s): Prairie Land Regional Division No. 25

February 11, 2010 • Consort • Consort Senior High School
School Board(s): Prairie Land Regional Division No. 25

February 16, 2010 • Edmonton • Holy Trinity Catholic High School
School Board(s): Edmonton Catholic School District

February 22, 2010 • Cessford • Berry Creek Community School
School Board(s): Prairie Land Regional Division No. 25

February 24, 2010 • Medicine Hat • Crescent Heights High School
School Board(s): Medicine Hat School District No. 76

February 24, 2010 • Edmonton • Old Scona Academic High School
School Board(s): Edmonton School District No. 7

February 26, 2010 • Calgary • Bishop Carroll High School
School Board(s): Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School District No. 1

February 2010 • Hanna • J.C. Charyk Hanna School
School Board(s): Palliser Regional Division No. 26

February 2010 • Hanna • J.C. Charyk Hanna School
School Board(s): Palliser Regional Division No. 26

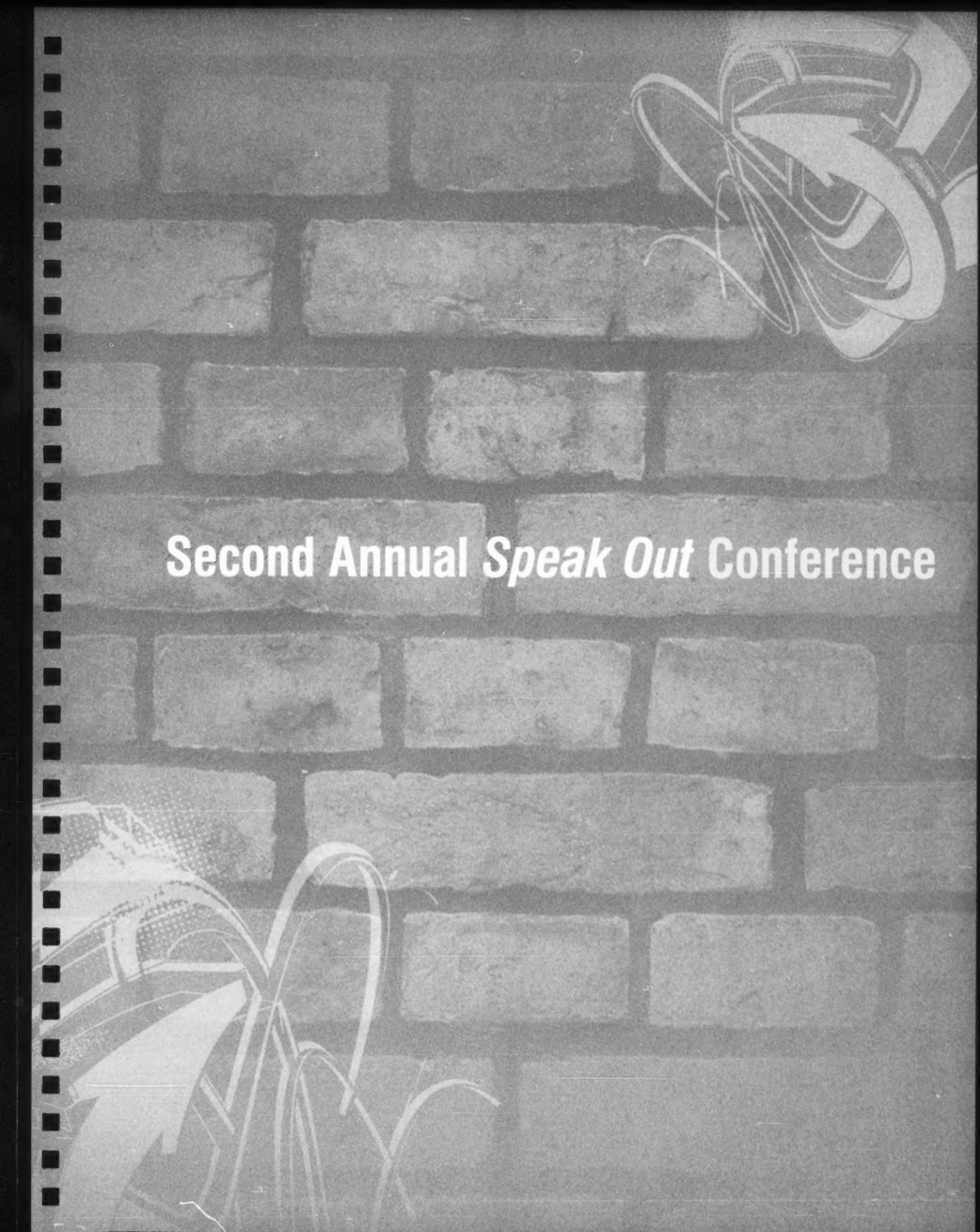
February 2010 • Edson • Holy Redeemer High School
School Board(s): Living Waters Catholic Regional Division No. 42

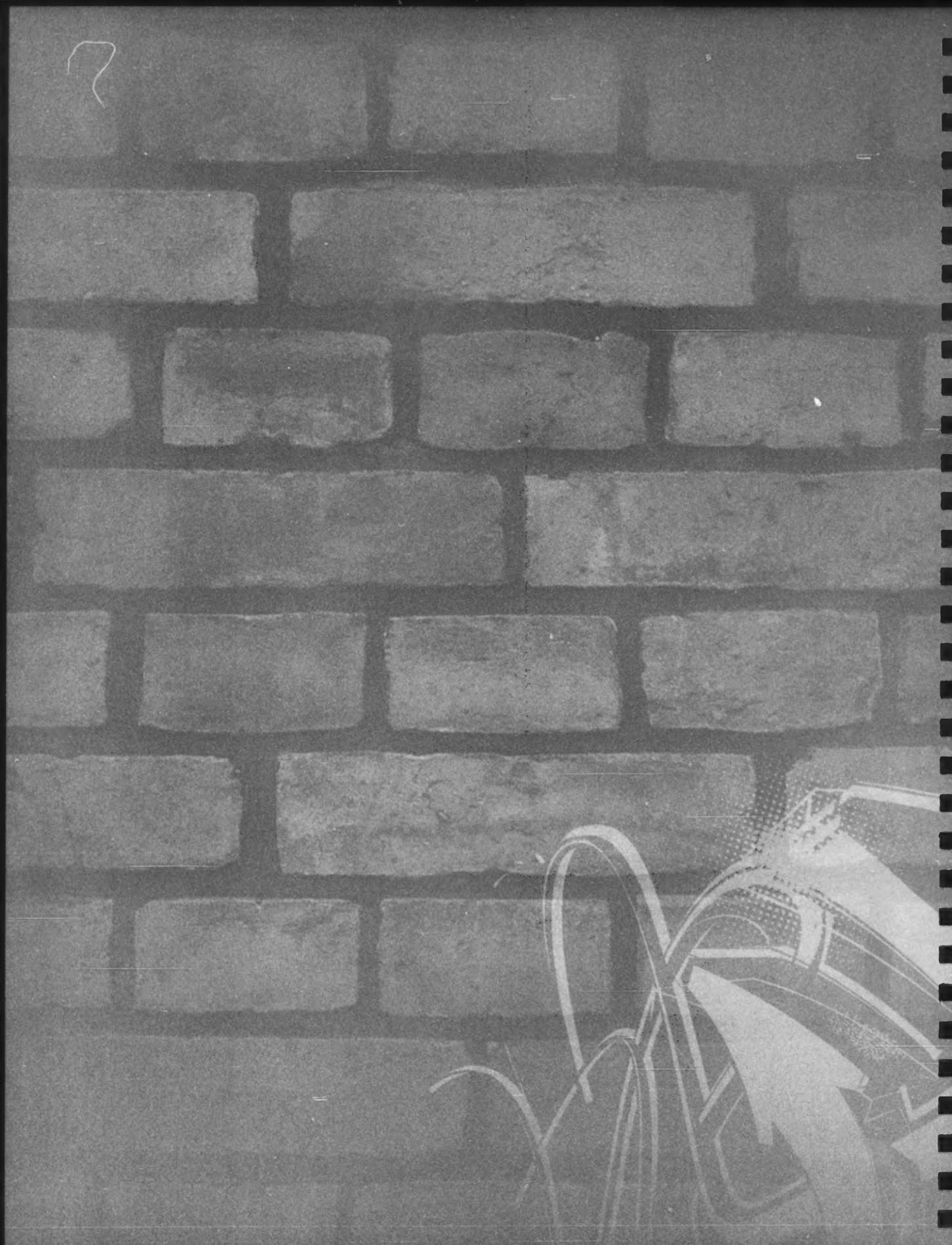
March 4, 2010 • Edmonton • Hillcrest Junior High School
School Board(s): Edmonton School District No. 7

March 12, 2010 • Edmonton • Kate Chegwin Junior High School
School Board(s): Edmonton School District No. 7

March 25, 2010 • Oyen • Oyen Public School
School Board(s): Prairie Rose School Division No. 8

*All DVD toolkit forums conducted after March 2010 will be reported in the 2010–2011 Year in Review.


Second Annual *Speak Out* Conference



Second Annual *Speak Out* Conference

The most common suggestion we heard in speaking to thousands of students during the *Speak Out* launch year was that students were seeking improved and more meaningful relationships with their educators. In response to this suggestion, the *Speak Out* team invited both students and educators to participate in the second Annual *Speak Out* Conference. A total of 190 student delegates, 20 members of the Minister's Student Advisory Council, 85 educators and 61 chaperones attended the conference in Edmonton from May 14 to 16, 2010.

The conference provided the opportunity for Alberta's youth and educators to come together from across the province to discuss their perspectives and ideas on how to improve education.

The conference was hosted by the Minister's Student Advisory Council and coordinated by the *Speak Out* team. The third Annual *Speak Out* Conference is scheduled for April 15 to 17, 2011, in Edmonton.

Where They Came From

The *Speak Out* team recruited conference attendees from all corners of the province. Fifty-four communities were represented by students and educators at the conference. The hometowns of the conference participants are listed below:

- Amisk
- Bonnyville
- Bow Island
- Brooks
- Calgary
- Caslan
- Cochrane
- Czar
- Dixonville
- Drayton Valley
- Drumheller
- Eaglesham
- Edmonton
- Edson
- Fort McMurray
- Fort Saskatchewan
- Gift Lake
- Grande Cache
- Grande Prairie
- Hanna
- High Level
- High River
- Hines Creek
- Hughenden
- Irricana
- Kinuso
- Lac La Biche
- Lamont
- Lethbridge
- Lloydminster
- Mallaig
- Medicine Hat
- Meeting Creek
- Olds
- Okotoks
- Oyen
- Paddle Prairie
- Peace River
- Pincher Creek
- Rainier
- Red Deer
- Red Earth Creek
- Redwater
- Redwood Meadows
- Rocky Rapids
- Sherwood Park
- Spruce Grove
- St. Albert
- St. Brides
- St. Lina
- Stony Plain
- Strathmore
- Tilley
- Wabasca

SPEAK OUT
ALBERTA STUDENT ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

Who We Spoke To

At the beginning of the conference forum, we asked both the students and the educators a series of "getting to know you" questions. Each participant filled out a questionnaire titled "Who's in the Room?". Below is a summary of the demographic information collected. The complete results can be found on pages 47 and 48.

Students, the top three reasons you go to school every day are because of your friends, because you enjoy it and because you want to go to college or university.

65% of student participants spend one to two hours on homework each night.

93% of student participants are on Facebook, MySpace or Twitter.

67% of student participants have more than 100 people listed as "friends" on social networking sites.

81% of student participants are physically active.

80% of student participants volunteer.

Students, the top three ways you learn best are by seeing, doing and listening.

38% of student participants are getting eight or more hours of sleep each night.

51% of student participants can speak a second language.

Educators, the top three reasons you go to work each day are because you enjoy it, because of your students and because working with youth keeps you young.

82% of educator participants are spending one to two hours preparing for school on an average night.

66% of educator participants are on Facebook, MySpace or Twitter.

90% of educator participants volunteer.

26% of educator participants can speak a second language.

41% of educator participants have more than 100 people listed as "friends" on social networking sites.

66% of educator participants are getting eight or more hours of sleep each night.

79% of educator participants are physically active.

Educators, you feel your students are learning at their best by doing, by working with others and by seeing.

Student voice

"I was at the conference. WOW!! Put it on the calendar for next year. This was an outstanding experience for everyone. THANK YOU team hot pink for all you did. Thanks to all the courageous, talented, enthusiastic, hard-working student participants. I have confidence in the future of Alberta!"

What Happened

Students from across Alberta wishing to attend the conference were asked to submit an application form. In order to ensure that a diverse student population was represented at the conference—including a cross-section of students from Grades 9 to 12, with differing academic goals and varied personal interests and abilities—the *Speak Out* team encouraged all students to apply. Of the students who applied from around the province, 190 students and 20 members of the Minister's Student Advisory Council participated in the conference. Additionally, 85 educators participated in the conference and chaperoned their students. The conference agenda is attached in Appendix C.

Day One

On the first day of the conference, participants were greeted by members of the Minister's Student Advisory Council. The Minister of Education and the president of the Alberta Teachers' Association provided welcoming remarks, and then all participants, including students, educators, Alberta Education staff and Alberta Teachers' Association representatives, enjoyed a welcome banquet and a keynote address by motivational speaker Keith Hawkins.

Day Two

On the second day of the conference, the student participants took part in a *Speak Out* forum facilitated by members of the Minister's Student Advisory Council using the DVD toolkit. For background information on the facilitation process, please refer to page 21. In the afternoon, students participated in a leadership session led by Keith Hawkins. The educators participated in a professional development session on student engagement and then took part in their own DVD *Speak Out* forum facilitated by members of the Minister's Student Advisory Council. The Minister of Education spent the day observing and interacting with students and educators.

Day Three

On the third day of the conference, we shared the results of the DVD *Speak Out* forums conducted on the previous day, comparing and contrasting students' and educators' results. Noting that each year's conference is just the start of the conversation, we encouraged all student and educator participants to go back to their own schools and communities and host their own *Speak Out* forums using the DVD toolkit. The conference was closed by the Minister of Education.

> "This was an amazing conference. At my school, I feel like I don't have a voice, but I KNOW I have ideas and opinions. It was great to share them and HAVE them heard."

What We Heard

Student *Speak Out* Forum

At the conference forum, students were asked the following four questions:

1. What does it look like when you are learning at your best?
2. What is holding you back from learning at your best?
3. What actions can adults take to improve how education looks and feels?
4. What actions can students take to improve how education looks and feels?

At the conference forum, students said they learn at their best when they experience positive and respectful teacher-student relationships and when teachers support students and enjoy their jobs. When asked what is holding them back, they identified a lack of motivation, accommodation, and support from teachers, as well as poor time management by both teachers and students. When asked what adults can do to improve how education looks and feels, they said adults (parents/guardians and teachers) should build trusting and supportive relationships with students. They also said that teachers should use a variety of teaching styles and adapt to student learning needs. Finally, when asked what actions students can take to improve how education looks and feels, students said they should take responsibility for their own education by getting involved, paying attention, setting goals and managing their time.

Educator *Speak Out* Forum

At the conference forum, educators were asked the following four questions:

1. What does it look like when you are teaching at your best?
2. What is holding you back from teaching at your best?
3. What actions can adults take to improve how education looks and feels?
4. What actions can students take to improve how education looks and feels?

At the conference forum, educators said that when they are teaching at their best, students are actively engaged and excited about their learning. They also said they are teaching at their best when they are able to adapt their instructional tools to creatively meet the needs of their students. When asked what is holding them back, they identified a lack of time for preparation and too much emphasis on standardized testing. When asked what adults can do to improve how education looks and feels, they suggested that parents/guardians should take a shared responsibility in their child's education. They also suggested that community involvement should be encouraged. Finally, when asked what actions students can take to improve how education looks and feels, educators suggested that students take ownership of their education by being ready to learn, setting goals, putting in effort and managing their time.

The tables on the following pages summarize the issues that arose from the student and educator *Speak Out* forums at the conference. The themes are taken directly from student and educator input and are listed in the tables in order of importance as ranked by participants.

"I have been going to conferences for more than 20 years and this one was one of the best that I have attended. Your choice of guest speakers really helped to keep a positive and upbeat mood while dealing with serious issues. As you stated at the conference this was the starting point for the conversation about the future of education in Alberta. I hope that in future years the results from this year's conference can become the starting point for more detailed conversations."

SPEAK OUT
ALBERTA STUDENT ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

Student voice

Prompt one: What does it look like when you are learning at your best?

The purpose of this prompt was to identify the conditions and tools required for optimal learning. Students were encouraged to consider how they learn best, both in school and in their personal lives.

Theme	Examples of the Student Voice* When Students Are Learning at Their Best
Teacher-student relationships are positive and respectful	• Students and teachers working together in an engaged, family environment • Both teacher and student listen to each other • Respect between teachers and students inspires a positive learning environment and engages students to learn further • Teacher is non-biased and has "cool" conversations with students • Students and teachers focus, respect each other and participate in order to have an active learning environment
Teachers support their students and enjoy their jobs	• Teachers have reasonable expectations and care about student success • Teachers are available • Teacher [illegible]
The learning environment is positive	• Non-threatening class environment • Striving for personal best • Natural light • Drama-free and comfortable • Creative and open-minded activities • Quiet classroom
Teachers adapt their teaching styles to their students	• Teachers with flexible teaching methods • Open-book exams and other varieties of evaluation • Teachers doing what they can do to let students experience different levels of learning
Students are motivated and interested, and they participate in class	• Pushing further, beyond our limits! • Participating actively in class • Awake in class • Everyone in the class is interested • Involved in class and school • Interested in the subject at hand
Students are able to apply what they're learning to real life	• Being able to apply what I learn in real life right now • The material I learn is applicable to real life
Students work together and support each other	• Friends helping friends! • Students learning together can better mentor each other • Working together to share ideas but still have independent growth • Connecting with other students
Students have no distractions	• Distractions are eliminated to ensure that focus is [illegible]

*These themes are taken directly from student input and are listed in order of importance as ranked by students.

Prompt one: What does it look like when you are teaching at your best?

The purpose of this prompt was to identify the conditions and tools required for educators to support optimal learning. Educators were encouraged to consider how they teach best, both in school and in their personal lives.

Theme	Examples of the Educator Voice* When Teachers Are Teaching at Their Best
Students are actively engaged and excited about their learning	• There is excitement about learning • Students are focused, involved, on task, extending their learning, conversing, making connections • All students are participating and contributing • They provide feedback
Teachers can adapt instructional tools to creatively meet the needs of their students	• Voices of students are heard and acknowledged regarding the task • Teachers respond to student achievement • Kids feel empowered • They address all learning styles • Students are in control of their own learning
Teachers can help students relate to the curriculum in a relaxed environment	• Students are comfortable to take learning risks • They make personal connections to the curriculum
Teachers are passionate about teaching and seek positive engagement among students and teachers	• There are energetic, engaging and positive interactions between and among students and teachers • They teach from passions and strengths to maximize their impact • Teachers are enthusiastic, animated, energetic, passionate and loving what they're doing
All stakeholders are actively engaged in education	• All stakeholders take an active role in positive and meaningful interactions and inquiry
Teachers feel supported	• Educators require the support (i.e., emotional, financial, professional development) and resources (i.e., time, technology) necessary to get the students to where they need to be

*These themes are taken directly from educator input and are listed in order of importance as ranked by educators.

> "As a teacher I was inspired by the passion expressed by students and teachers for continuous improvement for education in Alberta. I learned a lot and look forward to sharing the conference results with my school community. I met some very impressive students and educators. I will be sure to Speak Out and continue the process at my school."

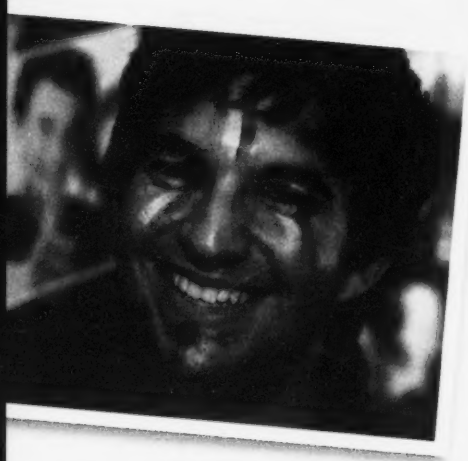
Prompt two: What is holding you back from learning at your best?

The purpose of this prompt was to have students reflect on the boundaries or limitations that prevent them from reaching their individual "optimal learning."

Student voice

Theme	Examples of the Student Voice* What Is Holding Them Back From Learning at Their Best
Lack of motivation, accommodation and support from teachers	• Lack of passion • Unrealistic expectations • Narrow teaching styles in the classroom • Teachers that aren't accommodating • Teachers that aren't motivating enough • Teachers that don't help when asked • Teachers that don't care about student education • Teachers that don't know enough about the subject they are teaching
Poor time management by teachers and students feeling overloaded	• Teachers that don't spend enough time on topic • When there is too much homework • There should be more class time for instruction, work, and less homework • No time to do homework with jobs, extracurricular activities • Teachers don't manage their time, but impose strict deadlines, unreasonable due dates
Distractions outside the classroom	• Problems that affect the way you learn in school, including peer pressure, sleep deprivation, bullying, and stress • Pressure to excel • Personal life in the classroom, including drama, relationship issues, Facebook, etc. • Peer drama • Dangerous environments, including drugs, gangs, etc. • Gossip
Stress and pressure from expectations and exams	• Too much weighting on diploma and final exams • High expectations to do well • Parent and teacher expectations that are too high
Distracting learning environment	• Phones • Noise • Drama • Students who are behind • Working at someone else's pace • Not being prepared for class
Poor student-teacher relationships (lack of respect, understanding or communication)	• Lack of respect between teachers and students • Difficulties with communication between teachers and students • Students not feeling [illegible]
Student apathy (not caring about the subjects or learning in school)	• Not caring about the subjects I learn in school • Getting bored • Other students in my classes not caring
Issues with the curriculum	• One-sided, biased textbooks • [illegible]
Inequalities of distribution of resources across the province	• The gap between quality of education between cities, rural, provinces, schools, etc.
Disconnect between [illegible]	• Disconnect between administration and students

*These themes are taken directly from student input and are listed in order of importance as ranked by students.



Educator voice

Prompt two: What is holding you back from teaching at your best?

The purpose of this prompt was to have educators reflect on the boundaries or limitations that prevent them from reaching their individual "optimal teaching."

Theme	Examples of the Educator Voice* What Is Holding Them Back From Teaching at Their Best
Lack of time for preparation and ability to complete curriculum	• Balancing work with home and family life • Lack of time to make things and lessons better • Lack of prep time • Extracurricular demands • Lack of time to finish the curriculum • Being voluntold • Having to do so much supervision • Too much paperwork
Too much emphasis on standardized testing	• Disconnect between government policy and quality teaching • Differentiated instruction versus standardized testing • Teaching to a test, not to life • A focus still on assessment of learning, rather than assessment for learning
Budget constraints	• Lack of resources • Lack of training in technology • Increase in class sizes • Removal of special education codes leading to reduced support • Student to teacher ratio
Lack of commitment and long-term visioning from school administration	• Lack of direction • Lack of a clear vision for the school • Poor communication • Inconsistent policies • Lack of strong administration to consistently enforce policies
Poor student attendance	• Students who don't regularly attend school

*These themes are taken directly from educator input and are listed in order of importance as ranked by educators.

"The whole concept is clearly well thought out and I think will slowly make a greater impact on the province."

"Overall, I think this conference was really well run and organized. My students and I really enjoyed the experience and I believe that it was beneficial to everyone's learning and understanding."

Prompt three: What actions can adults take to improve how education looks and feels?

The purpose of this prompt was to allow students to be creative and provide solutions or strategies that adults could undertake for overcoming the obstacles, boundaries or limitations identified in the discussion on the second prompt ("What is holding you back from learning at your best?").

Student voice

Theme	Examples of the Student Voice* Student Suggestions for Adult Action
Parents/guardians, teachers and administration: build trusting and supportive relationships with students	• Teachers and parents can help and support kids to build confidence and succeed • Have one-on-one time with the kids that need it • Provide help for bullying and outside difficulties • Encourage co-operation between students, teachers and parents • Realistic expectations • Be more supportive and provide after-school help with homework • Get involved in our hobbies • Be someone that students can talk to and trust • Encourage students to do their best • Don't generalize and stereotype students • Support each other
Teachers: use a variety of teaching styles and adapt to student learning needs	• Present the topic in multiple ways • Incorporate more technology into education • Use different approaches to teaching a subject • Give students more flexibility • Accommodate for different learning styles
Teachers: be motivated, engaged and enthusiastic in the classroom	• Be enthused! Students feed off teachers' enthusiasm for curriculum • Make us excited to learn • Portray passion and equality • Be motivated and teach students to be the same. • Let teachers teach in fields of interest—don't force them into subjects they don't want to teach
Parents, guardians, teachers and administration: show interest in students' lives and be involved	• Teachers, coaches, parents, talk to kids, get involved in their extra activities, show your school spirit, and show us some understanding • Teachers are more involved and are role models • Parents take more interest in the school activities and their child's activities • Parents are more enthusiastic and motivated towards education
Improve classroom and curriculum	• Diplomas are worth less • Curriculum and career planning involves students, parents, teachers, universities and colleges • There is consistency between schools • More current events are taught
Teachers: make yourselves available to help students	• Teachers are available to help • Teachers and parents help us get missed assignments • Information for student leadership is made available • There are no barriers to education
Use education funds more effectively to improve the school system	• Education funds are used effectively • Better communication from government on education funding

*These themes are taken directly from student input and are listed in order of importance as ranked by students.

Student voice

"The active engagement in the activities and sessions really were educating and actually made me feel more confident to voice my opinions."

Prompt three: What actions can adults take to improve how education looks and feels?

The purpose of this prompt was to allow educators to be creative and provide solutions or strategies that adults could undertake to overcome the obstacles, boundaries or limitations identified in the discussion on the second prompt ("What is holding you back from teaching at your best?").

Theme	Examples of the Educator Voice* Educator Suggestions for Adult Action
Parents/guardians: take a shared responsibility in their child's education	• Parents spend time with their children • Be a parent, not a friend • Be a good example • Take interest in what their children are learning • Parents reinforce and support learning habits at home
Encourage community involvement and support; define roles and responsibilities for stakeholders	• Seek community help with reading and writing • Collaborate with post-secondary schools • Make volunteerism part of a K–12 culture • Empower communities • Call upon community leaders to actively participate in schools
Provide ongoing training and professional development for educators	• Provide ongoing training and support throughout a teacher's career
Teachers: take ownership for personal career growth	• Own your own growth • Model meaningful professional development as part of life-long learning
Hold teachers accountable for doing their job	• Focus on kids, not teachers • Discipline or fire teachers who are not doing their job • Have a structured, fair system and follow it
Provide individualized learning for students	• Address the leftover "industrial/imperial" systems that formed the system as we know it • Decrease content in program of studies • Use student as basis for program—individualized learning and testing
Administration: communicate an enduring vision for education	• Have administrators communicate an enduring vision for education
Distribute funding for specific school needs	• Divert money to schools that is needed for the specific student body, not generalized
Allow teachers to take flex-time	• Let teachers take time in lieu or a week off during the year

*These themes are taken directly from educator input and are listed in order of importance as ranked by educators.

Prompt four: What actions can students take to improve how education looks and feels?

The purpose of this prompt was to allow students to be creative and provide solutions or strategies that they, as students, could apply in order to overcome the obstacles, boundaries or limitations identified in the discussion on the second prompt ("What is holding you back from learning at your best?").

Student voice

Theme	Examples of the Student Voice* Student Suggestions for Student Actions
Take responsibility and initiative in your education	• Figure out what you want to do after you graduate • Get involved • Talk to adults about your education concerns • Form relationships with teachers • Be more interactive with clubs, in the class, and outside of class • Be a mature contributor to the classroom, your peers, teachers, your school, community, etc. • Be a leader • Start clubs • Stand out in the student body. Go first! • Don't skip • Strive to do your best and be the best person you can be • Own your education • Take advantage of available opportunities • Step outside your comfort zone • Speak out!
Have a positive attitude	• Students with a positive attitude will be recognized by teachers and rewarded by motivated, excited teachers • Look on the bright side • Be happy • Be ready to learn • Be enthusiastic • Make homework fun by doing it your own way • Check your attitude at the door
Communicate your needs to your teachers	• Don't be afraid to ask for help • Express your opinion • Speak out to your teachers • Effectively communicate the changes you want to teachers, parents, and student council
Demonstrate respect toward teachers, parents/guardians and peers	• Respect each other and teachers; you get what you give • Be kind • Respect people's differences • Support friends with their aspirations

*These themes are taken directly from student input and are listed in order of importance as ranked by students.

"I liked how everyone respects and values my opinion!"

Prompt four: What actions can students take to improve how education looks and feels?

The purpose of this prompt was to allow educators to be creative and provide solutions or strategies that students could undertake to overcome the obstacles, boundaries or limitations identified in the discussion on the second prompt ("What is holding you back from teaching at your best?").

Theme	Examples of the Educator Voice* Educator Suggestions for Student Actions
Take ownership of your education	• Show up ready to learn • Eat nutritious food • Balance school with other activities • Set goals and expectations • Come prepared • Take pride in learning • Don't do it for us, do it for you! • Be part of the process • Advocate for yourself • Own your education • Take risks, ask questions • "Go first", engage yourself and take responsibility for your learning • Take ownership for your life and your education • Be open-minded about learning • Contribute to your school • Be kids as long as you can but be sincere and make an honest effort to learn. Be responsible and do not fake an interest
Have self-respect and respect for others	• Respect everyone, ideas, learning environment and yourself • Earn respect • Speak and listen with respect
Be involved in creating a positive school culture	• Form relationships between students and teachers • Participate in class and extracurricular activities • Get involved in school clubs and leadership

*These themes are taken directly from educator input and are listed in order of importance as ranked by educators.

> "The Speak Out team moved mountains with your conference. It will be the gold standard by which I judge all future conferences I am part of. Your hard work, amazing creativity, organizational skills and caring made this an event which impacted anyone who was fortunate enough to have taken part. That counts for adults as well as students—we all have the capacity to learn and grow. Congratulations on a very successful and impactful event—you should all feel very proud of your accomplishment. I feel privileged to have been a small part of it."

Common Themes

We found a number of common themes in the results from the student and educator *Speak Out* forums:

When asked what it looks like when they are learning/teaching at their best, both groups identified student engagement, passion, motivation, a positive learning environment, and flexibility and adaptability.

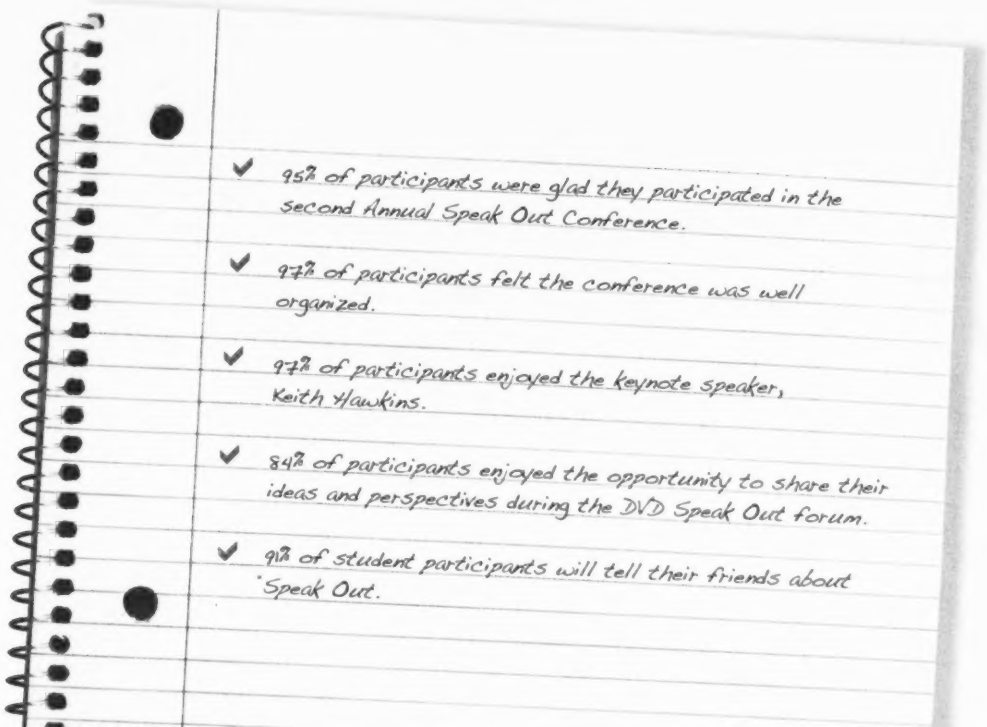
When asked what is holding them back from learning/teaching at their best, both groups identified the volume of work, assessment practices, ineffective distribution of resources, and apathy and student attendance.

When asked what actions adults can take to improve how education looks and feels, both students and educators suggested building strong relationships, sharing responsibility and involvement, personalizing learning for students, using education funds more effectively, holding teachers accountable and having a vision for the future of education.

Lastly, when asked what actions students can take to improve how education looks and feels, both groups suggested initiative and ownership, respect, and a positive attitude and school culture.

How We Did

At the conclusion of the conference, we asked all student and educator participants to fill out an evaluation. Some of the responses are listed below:


✔ 95% of participants were glad they participated in the second Annual Speak Out Conference.
✔ 97% of participants felt the conference was well organized.
✔ 97% of participants enjoyed the keynote speaker, Keith Hawkins.
✔ 84% of participants enjoyed the opportunity to share their ideas and perspectives during the DVD Speak Out forum.
✔ 91% of student participants will tell their friends about Speak Out.

Appendix A: Student Demographic Information

1) I am a:

Guy – 30%
Girl – 70%

2) I am in Grade:

9 – 30%
10 – 31%
11 – 21%
12 – 17%

3) I am on Facebook, MySpace or Twitter.

Yes – 93%
No – 7%

4) I have (#) people listed as friends or contacts on these social networking sites.

None – 7%
1–99 – 14%
100–249 – 39%
250–499 – 28%
500 or more – 11%

5) I usually spend about (#) hours doing homework on an average night.

0 – 22%
1 – 45%
2 – 20%
3 – 9%
4 or more – 4%

6) I am involved in...

Fine arts – 12%
Drama – 12%
School club(s) – 16%
Sports team(s) – 19%
Leadership – 20%
Music – 15%
Yearbook – 6%

7) I am physically active (work out, play on a sports team, etc.).

Yes – 81%
No – 19%

8) I volunteer.

Yes – 80%
No – 20%

9) I have a part-time job.

Yes – 36%
No – 64%

10) At my part-time job, I work about (#) hours each week.

0 – 60%
1–10 – 22%
11–20 –10%
21–30 – 5%
30 or more – 4%

11) I usually get (#) hours of sleep on an average night.

Less than 5 – 3%
5 – 7%
6 – 28%
7 – 24%
8 – 32%
More than 8 – 6%

12) I speak a second language.

Yes – 51%
No – 49%

13) I go to school each day because...

I enjoy it – 19%
My parents make me – 10%
Of my friends – 22%
There's nothing else to do – 2%
I want to get skills for a job – 12%
I want my high school diploma – 13%
I want to stay out of trouble – 0%
Of what I learn in classes – 4%
Of extracurricular activities (fine arts, drama, sports, clubs, etc.) – 4%
I want to go to college or university – 14%

14) I learn best by...

Listening – 19%
Seeing – 28%
Doing – 28%
Working with others – 11%
Working independently at my own pace – 11%
Using technology – 3%

> "Just wanted to say, thank you all who had worked hard organizing this Conference. I and my friends really enjoyed every single part of it, especially the keynote speaker, Mr. Keith Hawkins. What an awesome person. Also, it was a great improvement since the last year's Conference, way to go Jen, Kelley and Jamie and all other background volunteers!!!"

Appendix B: Educator Demographic Information

1) I am a:

Male – 38%
Female – 62%

2) I work with students in:

Junior high – 44%
Senior high – 56%

3) I am on Facebook, MySpace or Twitter.

Yes – 66%
No – 34%

4) I have (#) people listed as friends or contacts on these social networking sites.

None – 18%
1–99 – 41%
100–249 – 32%
250–499 – 7%
500 or more – 2%

5) I usually spend about (#) hours preparing for school on an average night.

0 – 6%
1 – 31%
2 – 51%
3 – 8%
4 or more – 4%

6) I support student involvement in...

Fine arts – 11%
Drama – 10%
School club(s) – 23%
Sports team(s) – 20%
Leadership – 21%
Music – 8%
Yearbook – 7%

7) I am physically active (work out, play on a sports team, etc.).

Yes – 79%
No – 21%

8) I volunteer.

Yes – 90%
No – 10%

9) I usually get (#) hours of sleep on an average night.

Less than 5 – 9%
5 – 4%
6 – 42%
7 – 31%
8 – 15%
More than 8 – 0%

10) I speak a second language.

Yes – 26%
No – 74%

11) I go to work each day as a teacher/educator because...

I enjoy it – 45%
I have to – 5%
Of my friends and colleagues – 6%
Of my students – 25%
Working with youth keeps me young – 10%
Of the job security – 3%
I get summers off – 2%
It's conducive to family life – 4%

12) I believe my students are learning at their best when they are...

Listening – 13%
Seeing – 16%
Doing – 41%
Working with others – 20%
Working independently at their own pace – 9%
Using technology – 2%

"As a teacher I was inspired by the passion expressed by students and teachers for continuous improvement for education in Alberta. I learned a lot and look forward to sharing the conference results with my school community. I met some very impressive students and educators. I will be sure to *Speak Out* and continue the process at my school."

2nd Annual *Speak Out* Conference Agenda

Friday, May 14, 2010			
3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.	Conference Registration		Hotel Lobby
6:00 p.m. to 7:15 p.m.	Welcoming Remarks from Honourable Dave Hancock, Minister of Education, and Carol Henderson, President of the Alberta Teachers' Association Dinner		Robson Ballroom
7:15 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.	**Health Break**		
7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.	Keynote Address by Keith Hawkins		Robson Ballroom
Saturday, May 15, 2010			
8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.	Breakfast and Welcome Address		Trade Centre
9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.	**Students:** *Speak Out* Forum in the Trade Centre	**Teachers:** Professional Development Session in the Alpine Lakes Room	Students: Trade Centre Teachers: Alpine Lakes Room
12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.	**Lunch**		Trade Centre
1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.	**Students:** Leadership Session in the Trade Centre	**Teachers:** *Speak Out* Forum in the Alpine Lakes Room	Students: Trade Centre Teachers: Alpine Lakes Room
4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.	Keynote Address by Keith Hawkins		Trade Centre
5:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.	**Health Break**		
6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.	**Dinner**		Trade Centre
7:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m.	Hip-hop Demonstration by 3SB Much Music Video Dance Party		Trade Centre
Sunday, May 16, 2010			
8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.	**Breakfast**		Robson Ballroom
9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.	Sharing the Student and Teacher Voice		Robson Ballroom
10:00 a.m. to 10:15 a.m.	**Health Break**		
10:15 a.m. to 11:15 a.m.	Call to Action by Keith Hawkins		Robson Ballroom
11:15 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.	Conference Closing Remarks by Honourable Dave Hancock, Minister of Education		Robson Ballroom

Minister's Student Advisory Council

Minister's Student Advisory Council

The concept of the Minister of Education's Student Advisory Council was announced in the February 2008 throne speech:

"This government will not let up on its efforts to further strengthen our education system. To provide a fresh and youthful perspective on learning, the government will establish a youth advisory committee on education. This committee will explore new and innovative ways to improve the learning opportunities available to young Albertans."

The Minister's Student Advisory Council explores ways to improve education in Alberta, and members act as ambassadors of *Speak Out* in their communities and schools. Council members were selected based on the diversity of their backgrounds, opinions and experiences as described in their written application forms. The selection process involved reviewing those applications and conducting telephone interviews. Alberta Education reviewed the short list of candidates, and final approval was granted by the Minister of Education.

Who They Are

The council consists of 24 youths between the ages of 14 and 19. For selection purposes, the province is divided into geographical zones, ensuring broad provincial representation. Council members are appointed to serve a one-year term, commencing in September of each year.

Student voice

"Everything was phenomenal. Opened my eyes to the horizon, more aware of connection between government/education, more passionate about education—feel emboldened to speak about it with anyone."

What They Did

Throughout their term, council members acted as ambassadors of *Speak Out*. Their responsibilities included the following:

- Participating in online discussions, polls, blogs, contests and surveys on the interactive *Speak Out* website with students from across the province
- Hosting a *Speak Out* forum, using the DVD toolkit, in their school or community
- Presenting the results of their *Speak Out* forum to the Minister and local school authorities and decision makers
- Assisting with recruitment, hosting and facilitation at the Annual *Speak Out* Conference
- Participating in several Ministry meetings and provincial conferences, contributing a student voice and perspective
- Providing ongoing feedback on *Speak Out* initiatives, including the website, promotional products, recruitment strategies and advertising campaigns

The *Speak Out* team prepared council members for success in these endeavours by providing orientation and training in leadership, public speaking, facilitation and media.

The *Speak Out* team worked with the council to follow up the great work that came out of the launch year of *Speak Out*. Following are the eight priority themes that students generated at the first Annual Student Conference, in 2009:

1. Effective and qualified teaching
2. Preparation for the future
3. Evaluation and testing
4. Student input and involvement
5. Relevant curriculum
6. Anti-bullying
7. Improvements to school atmosphere and environment
8. Healthy students

Student voice

"The network aspect of MSAC is great: I had the opportunity to meet and form friendships with 24 enthusiastic students from across the province, in addition to various government workers."

"Thank you very much for everything that you have all done for us. It has been amazing and an experience that I will always remember. I am so passionate."

In order to further explore these priority themes, the council took on a leadership role and met with key contacts for further discussions. Presentations and information-sharing sessions were held on the following topics at council meetings in September 2009, December 2009 and March 2010:

> "I appreciate your hard work and dedication and enthusiasm. It means a lot to me that all of you are so dedicated to us and getting our voice heard."

- Inspiring Education (Alberta Education)
- Communication (Alberta Education)
- Assessment (Alberta Education)
- Alberta Prevention of Bullying Youth Committee (Alberta Children and Youth Services)
- Curriculum (Arts Education)
- Teacher certification, qualification and evaluation (Alberta Education and College of Alberta School Superintendents)
- Curriculum development (Alberta Education)
- Mentoring (Alberta Education, Bellerose High School, university student, high school student)

2010–2011 Minister's Student Advisory Council

The council application process and selection is annual. All interested youth must submit an application, including current council members seeking renewal. The 2010–2011 council was publicly announced in a Government of Alberta information bulletin on June 25, 2010. The members of the council play a very important role in ensuring that the student voice continues to be sought and considered throughout the education system.

What's Next?

What's Next?

During this past year, *Speak Out* continued to work with students, both online and face to face, to let them know that the education system needed their perspectives, their ideas and their voice. In addition, *Speak Out* turned its attention to sharing that critical voice with the educational system, including government, universities, school boards, trustees, superintendents, principals, teachers and schools. Over 50 presentations were made at various Ministry events, conferences and other external meetings during this 2009–2010 school year. The momentum of student engagement and commitment to the student voice continues to grow. In order to improve the educational opportunities for youth in Alberta, we must recognize the value of the student perspective and provide opportunities for the conversations to continue, both locally and provincially.

As *Speak Out* enters its third year, the team will continue to reach out to Alberta's youth, encouraging them to share their ideas and to apply for both the conference and the council. The interactive and fully moderated website, with its growing membership, will continue to contribute to this valuable conversation. Essential small focus group discussions will occur again around the province at *Speak Out* forums planned for October and November 2010. Of course, students or schools can host their own *Speak Out* forum using the DVD toolkit any time during this coming school year. Use of the DVD toolkit not only builds local capacity and local engagement, but also enables more students to find their voice and speak out. Anyone interested in hosting a *Speak Out* forum can email **speakout@gov.ab.ca** to receive a free DVD toolkit and supplies.

The third Annual *Speak Out* Conference is tentatively scheduled for April 15–17, 2010, in Edmonton. Mark your calendars and apply early—this event fills up quickly! The Minister's Student Advisory Council will continue to work closely with Alberta Education, meeting several times this coming year in October 2010, January 2011 and May 2011. Most importantly, council members will take a leadership role by hosting their own *Speak Out* forums in their schools or communities, using the DVD toolkit.

Finally, the most exciting direction that *Speak Out* is going to pursue this upcoming year is to systematically follow up with forum hosts—both students and school administration—to track how things have changed since the conversation was started at the *Speak Out* forum. We look forward to being able to demonstrate to the system how the student voice can make—and has made—a difference for Alberta's youth and their education.

> "Meaningful student involvement is the process of engaging students as partners in every facet of school change for the purpose of strengthening their commitment to education, community and democracy."
> – Adam Fletcher, internationally recognized expert in youth engagement.

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Speak Out also gratefully acknowledges its sponsors.

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- Career and Technology Studies
- Cross-Ministry Services
- Curriculum
- Financial and Administrative Services
- First Nations, Métis and Inuit, and Field Services
- French Language Education Services
- Information and Technology Management
- Inspiring Education
- International Education Services
- Learner Assessment
- Learning Resources Centre
- Policy and Planning
- Professional Standards
- School Act Review
- School Research and Improvement
- School Technology
- Setting the Direction
- Special Education
- Teacher Development and Certification
- Web Services
- Workforce Planning and Development

Finally, the biggest thank you of all must go to the students in Alberta who have enthusiastically contributed to the website, participated in *Speak Out* forums, attended the Annual *Speak Out* Conference and been active members on our Minister's Student Advisory Council. Thank you for speaking out and sharing your perspectives and your voice.

speakout.alberta.ca